DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 128 PS 025 139

TITLE	How Can I Assess the Development of My Preschooler?
INSTITUTION	ACCESS ERIC, Rockville, MD.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NLE-97-2526
PUB DATE	97
CONTRACT	RK95188001
NOTE	9p.; This brochure is based on the 1994 ERIC-EECE Digest, "Assessing the Development of Preschoolers" written by Lilian G. Katz; see ED 372 875.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior Patterns; Child Behavior; *Child Development; Developmental Stages; Evaluation Criteria; *Individual Development; Intervention; Parent Materials; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Developmental Assessment

ABSTRACT

It is only natural for parents to wonder occasionally if the development of their preschool child is going well. Noting that psychologists have developed many normative scales to indicate how an individual child compares with others of the same age in similar populations, this parent brochure provides guidance for evaluating a child's behavior and achievements and for assessing what aspects of the child's development need special encouragement, support, or intervention. Topics covered in the brochure are: what categories of behavior to assess--including eating, sleeping, and playing--and when to intervene. Sources for additional information are included. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 405 128

How Can I Assess the Development of My Preschooler?

PS 025139

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It is only natural for parents to wonder occasionally if the development of their preschooler is going well. Questions such as, "Is my child doing what he or she is supposed to at this age?" and "Do all 4-year-olds behave this way in the same situation?" reflect a natural desire to be sure the child is progressing normally. Over the years, psychologists have developed many normative scales to indicate how an individual child compares with others of a given age in similar populations.

This brochure focuses on the question of individual growth, namely, "Is the individual child's development going so well that he or she can be described as thriving?" As you look at your own young child's behavior and achievements in the categories outlined below, you can address the question, "What aspects of my child's development need special encouragement, support, or intervention right now?"

What Categories of Behavior Should I Assess?

In the course of development, ups and downs are inevitable, even for children whose physical and mental endowments are normal. Occasionally children require intervention to get them successfully through a "down" period. Parents can observe behaviors in the 11 categories listed below during periods when they suspect a bit of a downturn. Keep in mind that difficulties in any single category are no cause for alarm. Indeed, difficulties in several categories do not imply irreversible problems; rather, they help us notice those periods when the child's life situation, for many possible reasons, is a bit out of adjustment with his or her emerging needs.

For 3-year-olds, a look at their behavior on the following criteria for a period of about 3 weeks is desirable. For 4-year-olds, 4 weeks should give a reliable picture of the quality of the child's life. At 5 years, add another week, and so forth. Be careful not to judge permanent behavior based on 1 day's observation. All of us, children and adults, have an occasional really bad day.

- **Sleeping Habits: Does your child usually fall asleep easily and wake up rested, ready to get on with life?** Occasional restless nights, nightmares, or grouchy mornings are all right. The average pattern of deep sleep resulting in morning eagerness is a good sign that the child experiences life as satisfying. Frequent insomnia or morning grouchiness for 3 or 4 weeks may indicate that a child is trying to cope with excessive stress, and a modification in lifestyle may be tried.
- **Eating Habits: Does your child usually eat with appetite?** Occasional skipping of meals or refusal of food is to be expected. Sometimes, a child is too busy with absorbing activities to bother with food at mealtimes. Also, remember that children may eat a lot at one meal and hardly anything at the next. However, a preschooler who for several weeks eats as though famine were around the corner or who constantly fusses about the menu or picks at the food may be asking for comfort.
- **Toilet Habits: Does your child have, on the average over several weeks, bowel and bladder control, especially during the day?** Occasional "accidents" are all right, particularly under special circumstances such as excessive intake of liquids, intestinal upset, or an intense concentration with ongoing activity, so that the child is too absorbed to attend to such "irrelevancies." Children who sleep well often take longer to stay continent at night.

- **Range of Emotions: Does your child show the capacity for a range of emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, grief, enthusiasm, excitement, frustration, love, and affection?** These need not be exhibited all in 1 day, of course, but should be seen over several weeks. A child whose emotions don't vary—who is always angry or sour or enthusiastic—may be in trouble. Note that expressions of sadness are not necessarily problematical; in appropriate situations, they can indicate the ability to really care about others.
- **Friendship: Can the child initiate and maintain satisfying relationships with one or more peers?** A child who often plays alone is not experiencing a developmental problem as long as the cause is not insufficient social competence. A child who is fearful of peers or who frequently claims superiority over others may be seeking reassurance or may doubt his or her ability to meet parents' lofty expectations.
- **Variations in Play: Does your child's play vary, and does your child add elements to the play, even though the play is with the same toys or materials?** A child who ritualistically and repetitively goes through the same sequence of play, with the same elements and in the same way, may be emotionally "stuck in neutral," indicating perhaps that the child has insufficient inner security to "play with the environment."
- **Responses to Authority: Does your child usually accept adult authority?** Occasional resistance, self-assertion, protest, and objections, when followed by ultimate yielding to the adult, indicate healthy socialization processes. Unfailing acceptance of adult demands and restrictions without a peep suggest excessive anxiety.
- **Curiosity: Does the child occasionally exhibit curiosity, adventure, and even mischief?** A child who never pries or snoops where forbidden may not be pushing against perceived boundaries enough for healthy development or

may fear punishment excessively. On the other hand, frequent manifestation of these behaviors may indicate a search for boundaries.

- ★ **Interest: Does the child occasionally become involved, absorbed, and interested in something outside of himself or herself?** The emphasis here is on sustained involvement in "activities" rather than in "passivities" such as television. A preschooler who cannot become absorbed in an activity or who rarely stays with a project until completion may need help.
- ★ **Spontaneous Affection: Does your child express spontaneous affection for one or more of those responsible for his or her care?** Note that this criterion refers to spontaneous declarations of love, not such displays as the required goodnight kiss. Also, demonstrations of affection vary among families and cultures and must be taken into account on this criterion. Nevertheless, in culturally appropriate ways, a child who is thriving is likely on occasion to express affection toward caretakers and deep pleasure in being with them. Excessive expressions of this kind, however, may signal doubts about the feelings caretakers have toward the child.
- ★ **Enjoyment of the "Good Things of Life": Does the child enjoy the good things of life?** For young children, playing with others; going to picnics, parties, festivals, and new places; and exploring new toys are parts of the good life. If a child has a problem such as shyness, fear of dogs, or food dislikes, but the problem is not so severe that it prevents him or her from enjoying childhood pleasures, then assume that the child will outgrow the problem. If, however, problems do prevent enjoyment of the good things of childhood, help is necessary.

When Should I Intervene?

The first 3 of these 11 criteria of sound development—sleeping, eating, and toilet habits—are particularly sensitive indicators of the child's well-being because only the child has control of them. The other criteria are more culture-bound and situationally determined.

When the pattern of a child's behavior in about half of the criteria seems less than optimum over a period of about 1 month, some remedial action should be taken. While each individual case will require its own special intervention, some general approaches are worth trying right away. For example, no matter what the underlying cause, almost all young children respond well to spending time alone with an adult who is important to them. The important adult may be a parent, relative, caregiver, or anyone else with whom the child has a significant relationship. The time can be spent walking around the block, helping to tidy up a closet, gardening, baking a cake, or doing anything else the child really enjoys. The activity should be simple. The main point is having someone special all to oneself. A few minutes a day for a few weeks will invariably help alleviate whatever stresses the child has encountered.

Once the level of stress is reduced and the child is more relaxed, he or she may then become more responsive to a parent's guidance and suggestions about how to cope with the problem at hand.

In some cases a child's development can get back on track when his or her daily routines are simplified. Many preschoolers have a hard time coping with frequent, rapid changes in environments within a day or week in which they are expected to be responsive and cooperative, to exercise self-control, and to be self-sufficient. For such children, reducing the number and rate of changes can go a long way toward helping them "get back on the right foot."

Where Can I Get More Information?

The following organizations offer information on the topic of assessing the development of preschoolers, as well as other information about early childhood education:

Child Care Action Campaign
330 7th Avenue, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Phone: 212–239–0138

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801–4897
Phone: 217–333–1386
Toll Free: 800–583–4135
Fax: 217–333–3767
E-mail: ericeece@uiuc.edu
Web: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/ericeece.html
Web: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html (National Parent Information Network)

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1509 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036–1426
Toll Free: 800–424–2460
Web: http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc

Sources

References identified with ED or EJ are abstracted in the ERIC database. References with EJ are journal articles available at most research libraries. Those with ED are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations or can be obtained in paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at 1–800–443–ERIC. Call 1–800–LET–ERIC for more details.

Bruce, Tina. Summer 1993. "For Parents Particularly: The Role of Play in Children's Lives." *Childhood Education* 69 (4): 237–238. EJ 465 878.

Gilkerson, Deanna. 1992. *Helping Children Develop Socially and Emotionally*. Brookings, SD: South Dakota State University. Cooperative Extension Service. ED 356 066.

Katz, Lilian G., and Diane E. McClellan. 1991. *The Teacher's Role in the Social Development of Young Children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ED 331 642.

McKenzie, Thomas L., and others. Spring 1991. "BEACHES: An Observational System for Assessing Children's Eating and Physical Activity Behaviors and Associated Events." *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 24 (1): 141–151. EJ 429 936.

Saunders, Sunny A., and Virginia Green. 1993. "Evaluating the Social Competence of Young Children: A Review of the Literature." *Early Child Development and Care* 87: 39–46. EJ 473 175.

☆ ☆ ☆

This brochure is based on the 1994 ERIC Digest, *Assessing the Development of Preschoolers*, written by Lilian G. Katz, Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

This publication was prepared by ACCESS ERIC with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RK95188001. The opinions expressed in this brochure do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. This brochure is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

☆ ☆ ☆

ERIC®

NLE 97–2526